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Inmate Education - FDC

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Good Evening Mr. Salman:

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide you with additional information for your article. We do apologize for the delay as we worked to provide you with the most comprehensive information available. Below, you'll find a quote from Secretary Inch, background information regarding FDC education initiatives and responses to your findings. Please read through this information thoroughly, and feel free to contact us with any questions. If you could let me know that you received this email, I would be most appreciative.

STATEMENT:

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FDC Secretary Mark Inch said, "When I was appointed by Governor DeSantis in January, I immediately recognized the need for additional educational and vocational programming. We appreciate the support of the Legislature for adding twenty additional teaching positions for the upcoming fiscal year. These positions will allow us to expand inmate programming and increase the quality of teacher-led instruction. Providing programming to inmates and offenders is one of the strongest components in reducing recidivism and is also critical to the safe operation of our institutions.

"The Florida Department of Corrections is proud to partner with various faith-based and volunteer organizations, colleges and universities, to enhance educational and vocational opportunities for our inmate population."

BACKGROUND:

The Florida Department of Corrections has been working with collegiate and correctional leaders nationwide to ensure the educational and vocational programs offered in Florida are evidenced-based and will equip inmates and offenders with the skills they need to be successful after they leave our custody.

The framework is in place to expand the reach of these programs and the number of inmates served as we continue to look for ways to maximize our resources.

FDC Secretary Mark Inch spent his career studying correctional best practices. We know these programs work because we see it each and every day. Our academic teachers, vocational teachers, and volunteers embody our mission to inspire success by transforming one life at a time. While recruiting teachers in the correctional environment can be challenging, we are making diligent efforts to ensure these positions are filled as quickly as possible to maximize the number of inmates served.

FDC Education Initiatives

- **Chromebooks and Inmate Educational Network Access** - Approximately 1,600 Chromebooks have recently been introduced into 64 educational sites statewide. The Chromebooks are currently being used to provide academic diagnostic assessments and to measure learning gains. In the coming months, the expansion of this program will include opportunities for computer-assisted instruction, career exploration, workforce readiness and additional educational support using secured inmate access to the internet.
- **CTE College Partnerships** – In addition to the career and technical programming facilitated directly through Department staff, the Department also maintains contracts with the following community colleges and technical schools throughout the state for the provision of career and technical education programming inside Department-operated institutions:
 - Polk State College
 - Florida Panhandle Technical School
 - Tallahassee Community College
 - Indian River State College
 - Daytona State College
 - Palm Beach State College
 - Florida Gateway College
- **Job Assignment Credentialing** - The Florida Department of Corrections operates a variety of job assignment credentialing programs, each of which has a standard set of competencies that the participant is expected to display by program completion. All job assignment credentialing programs rely on a subject matter expert (SME) to assist in delivering job-related instruction, issuing industry-related credentials and certifying that program participants have mastered the associated competencies. The Department currently operates the following job assignment credentialing programs:
 - Office Computer Software
 - Warehousing
 - Culinary
 - Canine Obedience Training
 - Horticulture
 - Farm worker
 - Beekeeper training
- **USF Entrepreneurship Program** – Since September 2016, Dr. Jessica Grosholz and Dr. Jean Kabongo, from the University of South Florida, have facilitated a 10-week entrepreneurship program to incarcerated individuals at Hardee Correctional Institution. This course provides an introductory overview of the knowledge and skills needed for the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities in a variety of circumstances and environments.
- **USF Literacy Project** – The Department partnered with USF to provide a literacy improvement program provided at Polk CI. Instructors from USF selected texts and audio books to work with low-level readers.
- **Exchange For Change** (<https://www.exchange-for-change.org/>) - The nonprofit organization, Exchange for Change, teaches writing in prisons and runs letter exchanges between incarcerated students and writers studying on the outside. Exchange for Change has partnered with the University of Miami, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Ransom Everglades School, and Emory University to provide program services at Dade Correctional Institution and Everglades Correctional Institution.
- **Florida Prison Education Project (FPEP)** (<http://cah.ucf.edu/fpep/>) – Founded in 2017 by the current director, Dr. Keri Watson, the Florida Prison Education Project (FPEP) provides non-credit bearing courses at the Central Florida Reception Center. More than 50 members of the University of Central Florida's (UCF) faculty staff are affiliated with the program. Additionally, there are three student interns and volunteers that assist with coordinating the program. Last year, FPEP was selected as UCF's Community Challenge Initiative designee, and was awarded \$50,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts grant, \$29,000 in NEA Big Read grants, and collected more than 5,000 books for Books Behind Bars.

- **Stetson University Community Education Project** – Founded in 2015, the Stetson University Community Education Project provides non-credit bearing courses at Tomoka Correctional Institution. The Stetson Community Education Project was awarded a \$210,000 grant in June 2018; that fall, they began offering one course each semester for non-degree-bearing college credit. The Laughing Gull Foundation approved a grant for \$70,000 a year for three years for the CEP, which will pay to hire a project coordinator who will tutor incarcerated students and serve as a liaison with the Department. More than 25 Stetson professors have taught classes, led workshops and provided guest lectures at TCI. Topics have included history, Spanish, philosophy, mathematics, communication, computer sciences and English. The CEP has been supported in part by the Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform and its Research Impact Award. The program received its original seed funding through the Hollis Renaissance Fund.
- **LEAP** (<https://leapforladies.org/program/>) – otherwise known as the Ladies Empowering Action Program (LEAP), is an eight-month, 300-hour long program where women learn essential life skills. In addition to the curriculum “Thinking for a Change,” LEAP students also take up journaling and meditation; explore personal strengths; talk with experts on domestic violence, addiction and co-dependency; and learn employability skills and how to start their own business from a Barry University professor in the Entrepreneurial Institute of the Andrea School of Business. LEAP facilitates their in-prison program to incarcerated women at Homestead Correctional Institution
- **CareerSource** - The Florida Department of Corrections is collaborating with CareerSource Florida to design and implement a comprehensive employment preparation, technical training and job placement program for incarcerated individuals in Department custody prior to release. The project will:
 - Expand the scope and number of incarcerated individuals in Department custody receiving pre-release technical training and employability services.
 - Support alignment of pre-release technical training with statewide / regional employer demand.
 - Develop and test methods for tracking returning citizen employment and earnings outcomes post-release.
 - Share CareerSource system workforce development knowledge and expertise with the Department and build Department capacity at the institutional level to expand scope and effectiveness of pre-release technical training and employability services.
 - Develop best practices, identify opportunities for continuous improvement, and evaluate continued viability.
 - Advance FDC and CareerSource system collaboration in developing a pre-release model for technical training, employment readiness and successful re-entry into the community with potential for replication statewide.
- **Tablet-Based Educational Programming** - FDC contracts with JPay to provide tablets to the inmate population. Among their many applications, the tablets offer educational opportunities through JPay’s cross-functional *Lantern* program. Currently, more than 47,000 inmates in Florida prisons have JPay tablets, providing access to educational programming at no additional cost.
- **Faith-Based Educational Opportunities** - Horizons Communities, an FDC-contracted vendor, operates in four faith and character institutions (Tomoka CI, Wakulla CI, Everglades CI and Lowell CI) providing educational opportunities to inmates. The programs include adult basic education, GED classes, basic literacy classes and other educational classes such as personal finance, employability skills and developing a business plan.
- **Volunteer-Based Educational Opportunities** – hundreds of volunteers and volunteer groups are involved in literacy programs and other similar educational classes for incarcerated individuals statewide.

FDC incentivizes education for qualifying inmates. A 60-day gain time education achievement is recommended for inmates that complete an academic education program by earning a GED or High School Diploma or by completing a career/technical education training program by earning a full program completion certificate/credential.

Additional information on vocational programming and career and technical classes can be found starting on page 34 of our latest annual report.

http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/annual/1718/FDC_AR2017-18.pdf

Second Chance Pell Pilot Program

On May 17, FDC was proud to announce the first class of college graduates from the Florida Gateway College (FGC) Second Chance Pell Program. This education initiative is designed to help inmates get jobs, support their families and succeed in their communities when they are released.

FGC is one of only sixty-seven colleges participating in this type of programming nationwide and is currently the only college in Florida offering these degrees to inmates. "We believe this program will significantly reduce recidivism in the state of Florida, while providing workforce skills to those being released from prison." Dr. Lawrence Barrett, President, Florida Gateway College.

Of the 47 program participants, 44 graduated with Summa Cum Laude and Magna Cum Laude academic honors. This achievement serves as further evidence of the effectiveness of providing higher level educational programming to incarcerated individuals. Providing such opportunities is not only beneficial to individuals in the program, but to the Florida communities where these graduates will return to live, work and inspire others.

The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program offers Pell Grant eligibility to inmates selected and supervised by FDC who are eligible for upcoming release within the next five years. Courses leading to an associate degree in general studies or environmental science technology are offered each semester. The next anticipated class will begin in the fall.

Responses:

Officials at the highest ranks of the prison system acknowledge the impact of education on reducing reoffender rates. Yet one in three state inmates reads below a sixth-grade level, two in three lack a high school diploma and fewer are earning basic educational credits. During the past eight years, the number of inmates who completed GEDs in Florida prisons dropped by more than 60 percent. GED classes are reserved first for inmates with fewer than two years remaining on their sentence.

There is a strong correlation between education and reducing recidivism. Because FDC does not verify high school diplomas (prior to sentence) for every inmate, the data would likely under-represent the number of inmates with a high school diploma.

Inmates who are closer to release have a greater urgency for education programming which may be instrumental to their successful reentry to the community. Although there is no restriction based on length of sentence or time remaining to release associated with academic program placement, inmates within 50 months of release are prioritized for academic program placement.

The number of inmates who earned a GED in Florida prisons slid from nearly 3,000 in 2010 to just more than 1,100 last year.

In 2014, the national GED testing requirements underwent a significant change and became more difficult. As a result, the entire nation saw a decrease in the number of students that passed. The Department has made significant strides in responding to the increased GED requirements.

Currently there is an 85 percent pass rate among inmates attempting the GED, which exceeds the passing rate of non-incarcerated individuals.

Additionally, on May 17, FDC was proud to announce the first class of college graduates from the Florida Gateway College (FGC) Second Chance Pell Program. This education initiative is designed to help inmates get jobs, support their families and succeed in their communities when they are released. Of the 47 program participants, 44 graduated with Suma Cum Laude and Magna Cum Laude academic honors.

Georgia, with about half as many inmates as Florida, confers nearly three times as many GEDs. And the number of GED grads in Georgia prisons has increased in recent years.

As part of our ongoing commitment to providing effective programming, FDC worked with the Legislature to obtain an additional 20 educator positions this fiscal year. These positions will allow FDC to expand inmate programming and increase the quality of teacher-led instruction.

These 20 educator positions are in addition to the current 118 academic teacher positions serving an inmate population of approximately 96,000.

Texas also awarded more than three times the number of prison GEDs than Florida last year, with a prison population some 50 percent larger.

Florida prisons administer the Adult Basic Education test to offenders when they arrive and again upon release. In 2018, just 3 percent of inmates showed improvement in their math and reading.

FDC administers the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment to inmates during their reception, however, only inmates that participate in specific inmate classes are re-tested, and only upon release. Of those in the educational program, 25 percent of those made learning gains on the TABE and 38 percent made learning gains on the GED.

There are inmates that participate in other educational opportunities that would not be captured by the TABE. FDC offers educational programs which offer practical, professional skills that will help inmates re-enter their communities and the workforce.

The TABE only tests for reading, math and language. While these are important measurements, we separately offer training in subjects ranging from personal finance, employability skills, basic literacy to developing a business plan. We also issue credentials for a variety of career paths.

Prisons have instead focused on vocation, emphasizing industrial training for mechanics, plumbers and electricians. But inmates say certificates are effectively useless. Some who graduated from carpentry classes told us they can hardly swing a hammer and could not find work in their trades upon release.

All Career and Technical Education Courses are based on the Florida Department of Education curriculum frameworks and standards as well as the industry recognized NCCER (*National Center for Construction Education and Research*) curriculum.

Inmates who receive a vocational certificate have met DOE standards, which are the same as individuals who obtained a similar certificate from public or private vocational programs offered through high schools and other vocational centers.

Inmates at Polk Correctional Institution said they spent the entire time in an automotive technology class reading from an outdated textbook. Then the course abruptly transitioned to marine technology — and the instructor quit.

The automotive instructor at Polk CI retired and a decision was made to update the program offering based on available curriculum from FLDOE and the occupational outlook. Efforts to hire a replacement for the class were initiated quickly.

Many industry professionals also say offenders cannot adequately learn a skill like plumbing or cabinetry behind bars without access to proper hands-on experience.

The Department recognizes the importance of real-world application of trade skills. Hands-on instruction and application are provided in classrooms and shop areas. Furthermore, Live Work Projects provide opportunities for offenders to build, remodel, or repair items owned by state, county, local government and non-profit agencies providing cost-savings to those entities while allowing students behind bars to practice their skills.

All Career and Technical Education programs are reviewed by industry groups such as the Florida Masonry Association, Northeast Florida Builders Association and the Career Technical Education Advisory Board Committee for program effectiveness and to ensure all programs are aligned with industry needs.

FDC Masonry Program participants receive industry-recognized certifications that transfer to credit when applying for apprenticeship programs upon release, allowing them to immediately begin working toward advancement.

Unlike the industry certifications awarded at technical colleges, the DOC's certificates are not backed by the Florida Department of Education or most trade organizations.

All vocational programs taught by FDC staff are aligned with DOE curriculum framework standards. Hiring requirements are based on DOE guidelines that require instructors hold at least one of the teacher certifications indicated for that course.

The Department contracts with local colleges and universities to deliver post-secondary education programs and offer certificates to offenders who complete the programs. Additionally, industry certifications have been incorporated into career and technical education programs.

Specifically, construction-related programs provide NCCER (National Center for Construction Education & Research) certification. These and other programs include:

- Northwest Florida Reception Center: Electrical with Florida Panhandle Technical College
- Liberty CI, Jefferson CI, Taylor CI and Taylor Annex: Masonry, Electrical, Plumbing, Carpentry with Tallahassee Community College
- Quincy Annex: Culinary with Tallahassee Community College
- Florida State Prison: Electrical with North Florida Technical College
- Gadsden Re-Entry Center: Horticulture with FAMU
- Lawtey CI: HVAC with North Florida Technical College
- Tomoka CI: Building Construction Technology with Daytona State College, Classes on Communication, History, Philosophy, Latin American Studies, English, Spanish with Stetson University
- Columbia CI: Associates of Arts (Business and Water Resources) with Florida Gateway College (Second Chance Pell grant program)
- Polk CI: Advanced Manufacturing (Certified Production Technician) with Polk State College
- Okeechobee CI: Advanced Manufacturing (Certified Production Technician), Warehousing (upcoming), and Entrepreneurship with Indian River State College
- Sago Palm Re-Entry Center: Water/Wastewater Treatment and HVAC with Palm Beach State College
- Everglades Re-Entry Center: Electrical with Home Builder's Institute
- Hardee CI: Entrepreneurship with University of South Florida
- Homestead CI: Entrepreneurship with Barry University

Funding for vocational training flows through the DOE, but the agency does not control the curriculum, set requirements or establish hiring standards.

Funding for career and technical education (vocational) programs is provided via general revenue appropriations as well as the Perkins Grant, which are administered by FLDOE. All vocational programs taught by FDC staff are aligned with DOE curriculum framework standards. Hiring requirements are based on DOE guidelines that require instructors hold at least one of the teacher certifications indicated for that course.

Tough on crime policies dating back to the 1980s have dismantled prison education. The state gutted inmate work programs raided the budget for education to cover shortfalls, and redirected hundreds of millions of dollars generated from prisoners and their families into the state's general fund — money once reserved for inmate programming.

The prison system is struggling to hire and retain staff. Several of Florida's largest state prisons have no full-time teachers — Polk C.I., the largest re-entry center, went at least nine months without one. That's because few people want the job. The position requires a bachelor's degree, with a starting salary of just over \$15 an hour. Competing public schools can offer safer working conditions and better pay.

The number of academic, special needs or vocational teachers on the payrolls declined 21 percent during the past decade. The position requires a bachelor's degree and pays an average salary of \$35,835 — or just more than \$17 per hour. The job also demands additional certifications annually, which is the teacher's responsibility to pay out-of-pocket, wardens said.

FDC strives to compete with local school districts to attract and retain educators. While we maintain a consistent vacancy rate, like local school districts, we regularly lose teachers due to certification issues. The Department continues to prioritize the recruitment of teachers, which includes advertising vacancies on People First and popular job search platforms, such as LinkedIn, and booths at job fairs at colleges and universities.

The expectation of teachers to pay for their certification exams is a consistent practice within the teaching profession.

For comparison, teachers at Sarasota County Public Schools average \$59,880.

The prison teaching staff is rife with turnover. Of the 205 teachers on the books in 2017, more than 40 percent of them were gone the next year. Fewer than 10 academic teachers remain from a decade ago.

As educational opportunities evaporate — and inmates are left with more free time — institutions are getting more dangerous. Assaults more than doubled during the past decade, with 5,763 reported incidents of inmate violence just last year. Inmate on staff assaults, which can include anything from spitting to stabbing, swelled at an ever higher rate. Brutality against corrections staffers grew 130 percent during the past four years alone. During that time, use of force by correctional officers spiked another 85 percent.

During the past three years, the Baker and Gadsden re-entry centers gave out more educational certifications per capita than any other correctional institutions in Florida by far, graduating hundreds from educational programs each year, with a total inmate capacity of 432. The two facilities were also among the safest.

FDC is extremely proud of the success experienced at the re-entry centers. However, there are other factors that contribute to academic success. Other facilities house inmates with a greater variety of custody levels than re-entry centers. A facility whose primary mission is to serve inmates with medical or mental health issues cannot be compared to a re-entry center.

Additionally, since all inmates at re-entry centers are closer to release, they are more likely to focus on education and other transitional services.

At Santa Rosa Correctional Institution, the Panhandle prison averaged 224 assaults per 1,000 inmates over the past three years — topping the state. Just four traditional Florida prisons gave out fewer educational credits than Santa Rosa during that time.

Santa Rosa CI houses mental health inmates and inmates with some of the highest custody levels in the state. Inmates in high custody status have a documented history of violence and cannot be placed in general population situations, such as a classroom.

The trend holds true with women's prisons as well. During the past three years, the Homestead and Hernando correctional institutions gave out more high school diplomas and GEDs per capita than other women's prisons, including Lowell Correctional in Ocala, the Lowell Annex and the Florida Women's Reception Center. Homestead and Hernando also had fewer assaults than those other facilities.

Lowell CI houses every custody level in the state — from youthful offenders to death row. They have a variety of missions and are unique to any other prison in the state. It would be difficult to compare their statistics to other facilities. Similarly, FWRC is a reception center, so their inmate population is extremely fluid. All female inmates must come through this facility before being placed at their permanent facility. The facility also houses medically needy inmates. Given the wide disparity, comparison of these facilities to one another is flawed.

Polk Correctional is Florida's largest re-entry center, with a primary mission to prepare inmates for release, the assistant warden told Senators in February. With fewer inmates earning basic education, violence is on the rise at the institution. And the prison is consistently outperformed by smaller re-entry centers across the state when it comes to educational programming.

The prison has just one academic teaching position, and the job was vacant for some nine months after the former teacher resigned for medical reasons. As a result, the facility had to halt its GED prep from at least September through April.

Two of the facility's three vocational teaching jobs also sat vacant for months, forcing the prison to temporarily close those programs as well.

Nearly 40 percent of the prison's staff is no longer on the payroll from three years ago. During the past decade, 33 employees from Polk's programs and chaplaincy department — which includes teachers — were either fired, quit or left the job, state records show.

During the past three years, other state institutions have consistently outperformed Polk Correctional when it comes to education.

At Polk, 66 inmates have graduated with either a GED or high school diploma since the middle of 2015, the start of the state's fiscal year.

By comparison, 174 have graduated at Baker Re-Entry Center, and 136 at Gadsden Re-Entry Center, even though Polk has almost three times as many inmates as both of those prisons.

Like just about every other aspect of the criminal justice system, racial disparities are evident with inmate education. Although a disproportionate number of state inmates are black, white prisoners are nearly 40 percent more likely to graduate from some type of educational programming while incarcerated.

The Department does not discriminate against any age, race or religion. An individual's race has absolutely no factor in determining access to education program opportunities.

There are more than 45,000 black inmates in Florida prisons — 47 percent the system's total population. For comparison, white inmates make up about 40 percent of state prisoners.

But during the past decade, 52 percent of prisoners graduating from courses designed for GED prep, high school equivalency or vocational training in institutions run by the Florida Department of Corrections were white.

The Department does not discriminate against any age, race or religion. An individual's race has absolutely no factor in determining access to education program opportunities. Multiple factors affect whether students graduate from programs.

Access to educational programs is needs-based. Inmates with lower skill and/or education levels are prioritized above inmates who have higher skill and/or education levels.

While black inmates outnumber incarcerated whites by nearly 6,700 in Florida prisons, there were 6,600 more white prisoners to earn these degrees.

Inmates and prison system experts say they don't believe wardens are picking who gets education based solely off skin color. But with a system structured to incentive shorter sentences, bias seeps through. If four white inmates with two years left and one black inmate serving five years all apply for a GED course at the same time, the four white inmates will get in before the black prisoner.

Inmates who are closer to release have a greater urgency for educational programming, which may be instrumental to their successful reentry to the community. To clarify, if the inmate serving five years is within 50 months of release, he will be afforded the same opportunity as the other inmates. Inmates within 50 months of release are *prioritized* for academic program placement; however, there is no *restriction* based on length of sentence or time remaining prior to release associated with academic program placement.

Inmates are ranked for placement using an integrated needs assessment method. Those determined to be most in need will receive priority for placement into academic, education, vocation and/or substance abuse treatment programs, as permitted by Department resources. As program slots become available, eligible inmates are notified and may begin classes at that time. For those ineligible for these programs, they can be referred by their classification officer to the Voluntary Literacy course.

The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program offers Pell Grant eligibility to inmates selected and supervised by FDC who are eligible for upcoming release within the next five years. Courses leading to an associate degree in general studies or environmental science technology are offered each semester. The next anticipated class will begin in the fall.

During the past decade, more than 57 percent of prisoners to earn education behind bars had a sentence length or five years or less.

Conversely, just 6.6 percent were serving sentences of 20 years or more.

With limited program seats, FDC targets inmates closer to release to ensure that those most in need are afforded the opportunity to participate in programs. Additionally, this practice ensures that an inmate's skills are current upon release.

Florida colleges are now trying to fill the gap by tapping volunteers and offering courses to prisoners who qualify. But the courses only reach a tiny portion of the general population. Efforts to expand have been stymied by a lack of funding and state policy.

FDC will continue to partner with our colleges and universities, faith-based partners and volunteer programs to make a difference. We will continue to use funds available to meet the needs of as many inmates as possible.

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